

# L. RON HUBBARD



## *Hurtling Wings*

GALAXY  
PRESENTS

## ***The Crash***

THREE hundred miles an hour is too fast for anybody,” said Georgia Kyle positively, but Cal only poised for the briefest instant on the catwalk of his racing plane to answer.

“Somebody will do it and it might as well be yours truly.” With that, he lowered himself into his pit and pulled his goggles down over his forehead.

The girl’s long black lashes dropped uncertainly down over her eyes, her face startlingly white under the jet of her hair. She looked up again and saw the picture Cal Bradley made sitting there in the narrow confines of his “office.” She saw his striped helmet, his brown leather jacket, his frank blue eyes and his rugged face—the face of a man born to take chances.

Georgia laid her hand on the cowling. “Cal, I wish you’d listen to me just once. I’ve a feeling that—”

Cal Bradley paused in his perusal of the sky and the hundreds of ships lined up on the tarmacs of the great hangars. Puzzled, he looked down.

“Maybe it’s silly,” she went on, “and I know you’ll laugh, but I have a premonition that you’re going to crash today.”

“The first day of the meet?” True to her prophecy, Cal laughed. “You’ve just got a case of jitters, honey. I’m going to live through this meet and a good many more. In fact, I’m

going to live long enough to buy out your dad and marry you and win a thousand races. Maybe this ship is all I've got in the world, but it's enough. Now, if you don't look out, I'll blast the engine and blow you clean through the grandstand!"

Georgia laughed and backed away, almost bumping into her father, Speed Kyle, who was hobbling up in time to wish Cal luck.

"Be careful!" Georgia called, above the growing roar of the engine.

"Good luck, Cal!" shouted Speed, and with a beaming smile on his weather-beaten face, he watched the small but speedy racing plane taxi away toward the line.

When the dust had settled from Cal's prop wash, Speed turned to his daughter with pretended ferocity. "The idea, telling that youngster to be careful, just when he's out to make the record!"

"He can be careful and fly fast, too, can't he?"

"Humph!" Speed grunted, and took her arm, leading her away toward the grandstand. "There's not so much difference between auto racing and plane racing, Georgia, and there's no difference at all between the fellows that do the driving. Why, as old as I am, I'd give my eye teeth to be up there in one of the Kyle racers giving Cal Bradley the run of his young life."

"You aren't so old, Dad," said Georgia.

"No? Well, I'm the deuce of a lot older than I care to be. I was in the auto racing game in 1902, and I've been building airplanes for fourteen years."

Having heard the story since the days of her hair ribbons,

Georgia diverted her attention to the line where three ships were coming in side by side.

“All ready to go,” she said. “I hope Cal doesn’t turn the pylons too fast.”

Speed’s grunt was interrupted by the grinding voice through the microphones saying that Cal Bradley, Bill Conklin and Smoke Gregory, the three speed kings of the air, were about to race against each other and the record, and that this was the first of a series of high-speed events which would be held at the National Air Meet.

Speed looked at Conklin’s ship with shrewd, appraising eyes. This was Speed’s own entry, and though he half hoped Cal Bradley would win, the flimsy thing of wood and steel which bore the Kyle Aircraft Eagle carried all Speed’s hope for immediate glory.

“Wish Bill had some of Cal’s fire,” he growled. “That ship of mine is twice as good as Cal’s. One of these days, Georgia, I’m going to sign up young Bradley and make a star out of him.”

“You mean you’d like to have him race for you?”

“Why not? He’s the coming bet of the country today, and with him at my sticks, we’d lead the field. I build ’em best, he flies ’em best. Say!” Speed’s frown went away under the light of sudden inspiration—“Why don’t you persuade him?”

Georgia’s glance was meant to be withering, but at that instant the ship flashed across the starting line and captured all of Speed’s attention.

Five hundred feet up, Cal Bradley looked to the right and left to assure himself that the other two contestants were

regularly spaced out behind him and shot the gun up into its last notch. The three-hundred-horsepower engine chattered and clanked and sent four hundred and forty feet of air behind it in the space of a single second. Three hundred miles an hour, and the air speed indicator was creeping even higher.

It was good to have a live motor in front of him, a sensitive stick in his fingers and a hurtling plane around him. Up ahead there were pylons to turn and wind currents to fight, but they were still ahead. Right now, Cal Bradley was perfectly content to sit in his cockpit and fly.

Directly to the rear, Smoke Gregory was hurling his Jupiter Aircraft ship into Cal's wake. Third in line came Bill Conklin, in the Kyle Eagle. Ahead of them the checkered pyramid which was Pylon One was looming.

Cal settled himself on the cushion his parachute made and prepared for the vertical which would soon be his lot. He spared the briefest glance to the rear to make certain of his airway and saw that Smoke Gregory, in the Jupiter ship, was gaining.

It was apparent that Jupiter Aircraft was out to win the day. Jupiter was like that. If their ship wasn't fast enough, the contestants had to beware severed control wires and graphite-filled crankcases.

Pylon One loomed to Cal's left, a great checkered tower marking the first lap of the course. Cal's engine was booming and his plane was traveling at a little over three hundred and ten. Gritting his teeth against the unconsciousness which would be his in an instant, he slapped his ship into a steep vertical and went around. He felt himself crushed against his

parachute. Everything went black, as the centrifugal force dragged the blood away from his head. But it was always that way, and almost before he realized what he did, the plane was level once more and heading for Pylon Two at five miles a minute.

The fields below dissolved into a monotone of green. Only the clouds above were distinguishable. The motor, heating up, dropped a note in pitch.

Unconsciousness again, right side up again, and Cal was heading for Pylon Three and the field. Behind him, coming closer, was the Jupiter ship, with Gregory's black hood showing above the motor cowl. Cal's plane had skidded on a turn and was losing rapidly.

And then Cal Bradley heard his engine's mighty song drop another notch in tone. He cast worried eyes at the panel and saw that his oil was getting hot. He was losing speed, and behind him Gregory's cowl grew large.

The field was becoming more distinct. Cal could see the grandstand, with its rows of upturned faces and its fluttering pennants. He could see the ships on the line—the hundreds of them from every part of the country and globe. He could even see the oil trucks, where the refueling was done.

The roar of his engine was dimming rapidly and his eyes narrowed until only a slit of blue could be seen through his goggles. His hand on the stick was white.

A flash of color to the left caught Cal's attention. It was Gregory drawing abreast of him full gun. And while his glance still lingered, Cal saw that Gregory was about to cut diagonally across Cal's nose.

Cal tensed, knowing too well what his own immediate fate would be. If his plane was caught in the area of disturbed air behind the Jupiter ship, he would crash. It was not until then that Cal remembered Georgia's premonition, and remembered it too late.

He felt his stick loosen in his fingers. The nose of his plane went down. The ground grew twisty and brown through the arc of his propeller. Without having time to think, Cal yanked back on his stick and sent the racing ship hurtling straight up toward the sun. But no plane built so light could withstand the terrific pressure on its wings.

Eight hundred feet above the ground, spinning straight up, the plane shed its right wing in a shower of splinters.

Cal's fingers went to his belt and snapped the buckle open. His legs fought against the ship's motion. The ship turned and headed downward at a speed over two hundred miles an hour.

With something like a prayer, Cal Bradley flung himself away from his shattered plane and pulled the rip cord of his chute at the same instant. No time here to count to three—the ground was hazy with nearness, the brown gravel was a racing blur beneath.

Cal felt himself rolling over and over through space. Something slithered out behind him, and then he fell straight long enough to make a bet with himself whether or not the chute would stop him before the ground did.

A giant tug against his shoulders and legs told him that the silk above had filled, and he began to swing like the pendulum of some huge clock.

Sighing with relief, Cal took his opportunity to look around. Not until then did he see that his plane had crashed in the middle of the field. It was blazing cheerfully—fifteen thousand dollars' worth of racing ship, and all of Cal Bradley's hopes. The plane was to have brought him prize money by the hatful and contracts by the score—but there it lay, a burning shambles.

And then Cal saw something else. He was gently coming down near the microphones in front of the grandstand.

Holding himself limp, he felt the ground strike his feet. The chute turned him, and then pulled him over on his back while he fought to get at the shrouds. The wind was towing him along the ground and sending up a geyser of fine yellow dust.

Line by line, Cal gathered in his shrouds until he could touch the edge of the silken hemisphere and spill out the wind.

Hands began to strip the harness from him. Other hands relieved him of the chute. Testing himself gingerly the while, Cal stood up and looked for Georgia.

An announcer was pulling at him. "Come up and tell the crowd you're all right."

"Sure," said Cal, and went.

"Hello, folks," he said. "I'm all right."

A cheer roared down to him like the bursting of waves on a beach, and then Speed Kyle had him by the shoulder. "Good stuff, Cal. That was quick work."

Cal nodded. "I'd show you some quicker work if I could get my hands on Smoke Gregory. The son of a gun did that on purpose, Speed!"



“Sure he did,” agreed Speed, quite cheerfully. “But that’s no call to go brawling about it.”

Georgia laid her hand on Cal’s dusty jacket sleeve, her face white, her mouth trembling. “I don’t like to say ‘I told you so,’ but—”

“Sure,” said Cal, “go ahead, if it will make you feel any better. I’m sorry I scared you, honey, but I couldn’t help it, honest.”

Speed laughed. “Go on, couldn’t you help it? Listen, Cal, I’ve something to ask you.”

“Shoot.”

“You haven’t any plane now, and a pilot without a plane is as bad as a duck without wings. How about working for me?”

Cal looked at Georgia with mock menace. “Did you put him up to this?”

“No!” boomed Speed. “She’s against my doing it. How about it?”

Out in the center of the field, the remains of Cal Bradley’s plane crackled dismally. Cal frowned sadly in its direction, then nodded. “Okay, Speed. I’ll push your jalopies around, so long as it isn’t a family affair.”

But before Speed Kyle could answer, a thundering roar burst out of the stands—laughter from ten thousand throats. It was not until then that Cal saw the microphone beside him and realized that every word he had spoken had been dinned through the surrounding countryside. The announcer grinned and ducked out of reach.